

**Rel 363 Religion and Society in Ancient Israel (IS)**      Fall 2019  
12:30-1:45 Monday/Wednesday in 233 CCC  
Prof. Alice Keefe                      email: akeefe@uwsp.edu      Office: 489A CCC  
Office hours: 2:00-3:00 Monday and Wednesday  
                         1:00-2:00 Tuesday and Thursday    and by appointment

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course introduces students to the literature of the Hebrew Bible (a.k.a. Jewish Scriptures, Tanakh, or Old Testament), with an emphasis upon the application of multiple disciplinary approaches in the work of interpretation.

In this course, we will study the Hebrew Bible as the literary creation of an ancient people, shaped in its composition by specific historical and sociological contexts. Our emphasis will be upon methods of interpretation, as is appropriate for an interdisciplinary studies class. We will see the meaning of any particular text is not fixed, and that any biblical text can be interpreted in multiple ways, depending upon the methodology used and the agenda of the interpreter.

No prior knowledge of the Bible or any religion is assumed or necessary for success in this class.

*Important note:* This is not a Bible study course such as one might find in a church or synagogue setting. The goal of a religiously-based Bible study course is to deepen faith by devotional reading and study of the Bible as revelation (i.e., the revealed word of God). The goal of an academic course such as this one is to explore the Bible in its dimension as a product of human experience, as a source for learning about the history of religion in the ancient world, and as a powerful shaper of culture in the world.

## **EXPECTED OUTCOMES**

*Students who successfully complete this course will:*

- gain introductory level understanding of the content of the Hebrew Bible and the social and historical contexts that shaped its production.
- Be able to identify and apply multiple disciplinary approaches in the interpretation of biblical texts
- Be able to explain the intersections of religious issues with political, economic and social issues in ancient Israel
- practice and improve skills in reading comprehension, information literacy, critical thinking and writing

## **REQUIRED BOOKS AND MATERIALS**

Jewish Study Bible (text rental)

Oxford Annotated Study Bible with the Apocrypha (text rental)

Michael Coogan, The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures (text rental)

Additional readings are posted on CANVAS

## **REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING SCALE**

3 short essays	8 % each
1 research paper (5-8 pp.)	25 %
midterm test	20 %
final test	20 %
Class attendance & participation	8 %
Oral report on research paper	3%

## **EXPLANATION OF ASSIGNMENTS**

**3 short essays:** These short writing assignments will require you to explore various research media useful for biblical interpretation and will train you in the application of multiple methodologies in the work of interpretation.

Your short essays should be

- grammatical and coherent.
- *typed* and double-spaced
- 300-500 words in length
- Addresses the prompt in a thorough and thoughtful manner
- Includes citations using a uniform citation method (e.g., APA, Chicago, MLA)
- Handed in on date indicated on syllabus. Late essays will be docked 2 pts per class meeting late.

**Midterm and final tests:** These tests will measure your mastery of the material covered in our assigned readings and class lectures.

**Attendance and participation:** You are expected to come to class consistently, having read the assigned material and thus able to participate fully.

Excessive absences will adversely affect your grade.

Excellent attendance: two or fewer unexcused absences = A in this category.

Good attendance: three to five unexcused absences = B in this category.

Poor attendance: six to eight unexcused absences = C in this category.

Even worse attendance: nine to ten unexcused absences = D in this category.

Failing attendance: eleven or more unexcused absences = specific failing grade calculated by following formula –  $x*100/30$  in which  $x$  = number of unexcused absences. If you miss class, you can check the “news” section of D2L to see if you missed any important information regarding the assignment schedule. Lecture notes will usually be posted in the “contents” section of D2L. *It is not the professor’s responsibility to fill you in on what you missed if you were absent.*

### **Excused absences**

An absence may be excused for reasons of illness, family emergency or a school or team related event; if you wish for an absence to be excused, you must send an email to Prof. Keefe stating the reason for your absence.

**Research paper:** approximately 5-8 pages in length. Your research paper:

- Should be based upon an approved research paper proposal (due April 9th)
- must focus on a problem of interpretation concerning a specific text (or related group of texts) from the Hebrew Bible.
- must employ at least two distinct methodological approaches.
- must include reflection on how these methodological approaches shape the interpretation reached.
- should be carefully thought out, leading from a question to a careful consideration of the problem of interpretation you are wrestling with, and ending with a thoughtful conclusion based on the arguments and evidence presented in the body of the essay.
- should show evidence of solid research methodology, including use of reference room materials, books, and scholarly articles (located through using databases). You must use at least 7 sources (beyond assigned readings and not including the Bible itself) for your papers drawn from a variety of research media.
- Must include notes where appropriate (using parenthetical notation, endnotes or footnotes) and a reference list citing all sources using a uniform citation format. You may use any standard citation format such as APA, Chicago or MLA style.
- should be typed, double-spaced, and relatively free of grammar and spelling errors. Grammar and spelling errors will lower your grade significantly.
- Must be accompanied by an **oral report** concerning your research.

## **Criteria for Oral Reports on your research**

- Your presentation should be approximately 5 minutes long.
- Your presentation should clearly communicate your research and ideas to your audience. The use of visual aids, such as having relevant scripture passages projected onto our board, are highly encouraged.
- Your presentation should include reflection on the contrasting disciplinary approaches which you used in your interpretation or which you encountered in your research
- Your presentation should be well organized, showing evidence that you spent time thinking about how to present your ideas and research in a short space of time.
- The best presentations will conclude with a question for your audience to consider and respond to.

## **Library Resources**

Note: The "Ref" prefix in the call # means this item is in the Reference Room. Please use all these resources, including those in the regular stacks, in the library and return to the proper place on the shelf when done.

**Bible Dictionaries:** for quick reference on key concepts, biblical characters, historical/geographical contexts, overviews of biblical books, etc.

Anchor Bible Dictionary, vol. 1-6 Ref BS 440 .A54 (BEST!)  
The New Interpreter's Bible Ref BS 491.2 .N484  
The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Ref BS 440 I 63

**One Volume or Multivolume biblical commentaries:** for quick reference on consensus scholarship regarding the historical contexts, transmission, and interpretation of specific biblical passages.

The Old Testament and Apocrypha. Fortress Commentary on the Bible BS491.3 .F66  
2014 v. 1  
JPS Torah Commentary (5 volumes) Ref BS1225.3 .J78  
Oxford Bible Commentary Ref BS491.3 .O94 2001  
Women's Bible Commentary BS 491.2 W66  
IVP Women's Bible Commentary BS521.4 .I97 2002  
The Torah: A Woman's Commentary BS 1225.53 T675

**In-depth commentaries on particular biblical books:** These can be obtained in our stacks, or gotten through universal borrowing or interlibrary loan.

E.g., The Anchor Bible commentary series: BS 192.2 A1 1964 .G3 (These books are in UWSP's stacks. Please use these books in the library, in consideration of others)

Other Bible commentaries are in the stacks or available through UB and ILL

**Database Resources (via Library homepage):**

**ATLA / Ebsco Religion database** - For searching for scholarly articles and essays on particular topics and texts relating to issues in biblical interpretation.

Access this resource through the library home page.

**On-line commentaries:**

Be very cautious about the use of on-line Bible Commentaries. Those available on line are *very* out of date. Also, much on-line Bible discussion is sectarian rather than scholarly in outlook. For easy access to classical Bible commentaries by theologians such as John Calvin (16<sup>th</sup> c), Martin Luther (16<sup>th</sup> c.), and John Wesley (18<sup>th</sup> c.), etc., go to [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com) and look under study tools.

**On translations:** You have (from text rental) two of the most highly respected translations of the Bible. Be sure to compare both whenever you are looking closely at a biblical passage. Also, there are several good websites where you can easily compare several different translations of the same passage. The website I use most is Bible Gateway, found at to [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com) . Another helpful site is Blue Letter Bible, which gives you a word for word breakdown of the original Hebrew or Greek.

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**Plagiarism Policy** I adhere to a strict policy on academic integrity. Any questions that you may have regarding academic integrity should be resolved before you turn your assignments in. The minimum penalty for a violation of academic integrity is a failure (zero) for the assignment. In addition, all infractions will be reported to the university. For more information regarding the university policy on academic misconduct (plagiarism)and disciplinary procedures, please see chapter 14 of the University Handbook, located at this web page link:  
<http://www.uwsp.edu/admin/stuaffairs/rights/rightsChap14.pdf>

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** is a federal law requiring educational institutions to provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. For more information about UWSP's policies, check here:  
<http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Documents/RightsRespons/ADA/rightsADAPolicyinfo.pdf>

If you have a disability and require classroom and/or exam accommodations, please register with the Disability Services Office and then contact me at the beginning of the course. I am happy to help in any way I can. For more information, please visit the Disability Services Office. You can also find more information here: <http://www4.uwsp.edu/special/disability/>.